

Message Text

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U.S. DEL NO.10

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: OVIP (ATHERTON, ALFRED L., JR.)
SUBJECT: ATHERTON MEETING WITH PRINCE SAUD

1. DURING AMBASSADOR WEST'S AND MY HOUR-AND-HALF
MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER PRINCE SAUD SUNDAY MORNING,
I CAREFULLY WENT THROUGH MY TALKING POINTS AS APPROVED
BY SECRETARY AND MADE A STRONG PITCH FOR SAUDI UNDER-
STANDING OF AND SUPPORT FOR CONTINUED DIRECT EGYPTIAN-
ISRAELI NEGOTIATIONS. I ALSO URGED THAT SAUDIS WEIGH IN
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WITH HUSSEIN. IT IS CLEAR SAUD REMAINS SKEPTICAL OF
THE UTILITY OF FURTHER TALKS AND WORRIED ABOUT THEIR
ADVERSE IMPACT ON SAUDI OBJECTIVE OF FORGING CONSENSUS OF
ARAB MODERATES. WHILE SAUD HAS UNDOUBTEDLY NOT BEEN
PERSUADED TO OUR VIEWPOINT, HOWEVER, I BELIEVE FROM THE
QUESTIONS HE ASKED THAT THE POINTS WE DISCUSSED HAVE
GIVEN HIM FOOD FOR THOUGHT.

2. AT A COUPLE OF POINTS DURING MY PRESENTATION SAUD SEEMED CONCERNED THAT WE APPEARED TO BE BACKING OFF THE APPROACH YOU HAD DISCUSSED WITH HIM DURING HIS LAST VISIT TO WASHINGTON. HIS BASIC THESIS WAS THAT BOTH EGYPT AND ISRAEL HAD NOW PUT FORWARD PROPOSALS, ANOTHER ROUND OF TALKS HAD TAKEN PLACE AND DEMONSTRATED THAT THE TWO SIDES COULD NOT MAKE PROGRESS ON THEIR OWN, AND IT WAS THEREFORE TIME TO TERMINATE DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS AND FOR THE U.S. TO STATE ITS POSITION. I STRESSED THAT WE WERE STILL PREPARED TO PLAY AN ACTIVE ROLE BUT THAT HOW IT WAS DONE WAS ALSO EXTREMELY IMPORTANT. WE COULD NOT EFFECTIVELY PLAY SUCH A ROLE IN A VACUUM OR IN CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH MADE IT APPEAR WE WERE INJECTING OURSELVES AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR THE EFFORTS OF THE PARTIES. A CONTINUING PROCESS OF DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS WAS ESSENTIAL, BUT THE POINT WAS THAT WE WOULD ALSO BE THERE AND HELPING THAT PROCESS MOVE FORWARD RATHER THAN IN CIRCLES AS HE FEARED. I WENT OVER AGAIN WITH HIM, AS DAVID NEWSOM HAD, ALL THE REASONS WHY CONTINUING EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI TALKS ARE IMPORTANT.

3. SAUD LISTENED CAREFULLY BUT ALSO WENT THROUGH HIS OWN ARGUMENTATION AT SOME LENGTH. HE MADE THE POINT THAT, WHILE THERE MAY BE GOOD U.S. AND ISRAELI REASONS FOR CONTINUING DIRECT TALKS (THOUGH HE CLEARLY REMAINS SECRET

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SKEPTICAL), WE FAILED TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE ARAB REASONS AGAINST THEM - IN PARTICULAR THE HARM THEY CAUSE TO SADAT AND TO EFFORTS TO BUILD A MODERATE ARAB CONSENSUS. "OUR VISUALIZATION," HE SAID SEVERAL TIMES, IS DIFFERENT FROM YOURS. HE ALSO SAID REPEATEDLY HE DID NOT THINK THERE WAS ANY SUBSTANTIAL DIFFERENCE AMONG THE ISRAELIS; THEY WERE ALL HARDLINERS; PERES AND DAYAN WERE SIMPLY SMOOTHER POLITICIANS THAN BEGIN (I TOLD HIM I DIFFERED ON THIS POINT: THERE WERE SUBSTANTIAL POLICY DIFFERENCES AMONG ISRAELI LEADERS). HE SAID EARLIER HE HAD ACCEPTED OUR ANALYSIS THAT INTERNAL DEBATE TOUCHED OFF BY SADAT INITIATIVE AND OUR STATEMENTS OF SUPPORT HAD BEEN HEALTHY, "BUT THIS TOO HAS A CULMINATING POINT." EVERY OPPORTUNITY HAD BEEN GIVEN ISRAEL TO CHANGE ITS VIEWS BUT CLEARLY IT HAD NOT DONE SO AND, IN HIS VIEW, WOULD NOT DO SO. HE HAD THOUGHT ONCE WE GOT ISRAEL'S ANSWERS TO OUR QUESTIONS WE WOULD BE READY TO MOVE. NOW WE WERE TALKING ABOUT MORE MEETINGS.

4. SAUD REPEATEDLY STATED HIS CONVICTION THAT THE ONLY THING THAT WOULD EVER GET ISRAEL TO CHANGE ITS POSITION WAS A U.S. PROPOSAL; WHEN WE HAD TAKEN A FORTHRIGHT

POSITION ON VARIOUS ISSUES IN THE PAST (E.G., SETTLEMENTS IN OCCUPIED TERRITORY), ISRAEL HAD SOONER OR LATER COME AROUND TO THEM.

5. SAUD STRESSED SEVERAL TIMES THAT OUR ASKING SADAT TO CONTINUE MEETING WITH THE ISRAELIS "WITHOUT KNOWING WHERE THESE MEETINGS ARE HEADING" WAS CAUSING SADAT SERIOUS INJURY. THE COST WAS NOT ONLY IN TERMS OF HIS RELATIONS WITH OTHER ARABS BUT ALSO INTERNALLY BECAUSE KEY PEOPLE WITHIN HIS OWN GOVERNMENT OPPOSED HIM. I TOLD HIM WE DID "KNOW WHERE WE WERE GOING" -- THAT WAS PRECISELY THE POINT. BUT WE HAD TO DO IT IN A WAY WHICH MADE OUR ROLE AS EFFECTIVE AS POSSIBLE. WE WERE INTERESTED IN MAKING PROGRESS, NOT JUST MAKING POINTS.
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I TOLD HIM OF OUR EXPECTATION OF ANOTHER MEETING AND YOUR INTENTION TO BE PRESENT.

6. SAUD ASKED SOME CLARIFYING QUESTIONS BUT MADE NO SUBSTANTIVE COMMENT ON OUR IDEAS FOR BRIDGING DIFFERENCES, WHICH I OUTLINED TO HIM, READING VERBATIM FROM THE TALKING POINTS. SINCE HIS NOTETAKER DID NOT APPEAR UP TO GETTING MY PRESENTATION IN FULL DETAIL, AND SINCE I THOUGHT IT VERY IMPORTANT THAT THERE BE NO MISUNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT IT, I TOOK SAUD ASIDE AT THE END OF THE MEETING AND LEFT HIM A COPY OF MY TALKING POINTS, STRESSING THIS WAS SENSITIVE AND FOR HIS INFORMATION ONLY. IT WAS A NON-PAPER AND NOT TO BE SHARED WITH OTHER GOVERNMENTS. HE READILY AGREED.

7. WE SPENT SOME TIME TALKING ABOUT INTER-ARAB RELATIONS AS THEY BEAR ON THE PEACE PROCESS. SAUD SAID OUR OBJECTIVE SHOULD BE TO MOVE THE NEGOTIATIONS TO A BROADER FORUM INVOLVING THE OTHER PARTIES AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. "EGYPT IS BEARING TOO MUCH OF A LOAD." HE URGED INTER ALIA THAT WE WORK ON BOUMEDIENE TO SOFTEN HIS ATTITUDE AND THAT WE ALSO NOT GIVE UP ON THE SYRIANS. SINCE HE HAD JUST SEEN KING HUSSEIN I ASKED HIM WHAT THE KING'S PRESENT ATTITUDE IS. SAUD SAID HUSSEIN WANTS TO KNOW "WHERE YOU ARE HEADED," AND ADDED HE DOUBTED THAT HUSSEIN WOULD AGREE TO JOIN THE NEGOTIATIONS UNLESS HE HAS ANSWERS TO THIS, "WITH OR WITHOUT SAUDI PLOTTING." SAUD SAID "NOW IS THE TIME FOR SADAT TO BUILD BRIDGES TO THE OTHER ARABS AND YOU SHOULD BE HELPING HIM." HE SAID SAUDI ARABIA WOULD CONTINUE TO STAND BY SADAT BUT MADE NO COMMITMENT TO SUPPORT PUBLICLY FURTHER EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI TALKS OR TO PRESS HUSSEIN TO DO SO. HIS ATTITUDE IN LATTER RESPECT
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WAS, IN EFFECT, THAT KEY TO HUSSEIN'S POSITION IS IN U.S., NOT SAUDI HANDS.

8. MEETING ENDED WITH SAUD SAYING HE LOOKED FORWARD TO YOUR VISIT TO THE AREA AND TO THE U.S. PUTTING FORWARD A PROPOSAL AT THAT TIME.

9. COMMENT: SAUD WAS RELAXED AND THOUGHTFUL THROUGHOUT OUR MEETING. HIS VIEWS CAME AS NO SURPRISE, BUT I WAS IMPRESSED WITH THE DEPTH OF CONCERN WITH WHICH HE ARGUED THEM. DESPITE MY EFFORTS TO REASSURE HIM, HE CLEARLY REMAINS WORRIED THAT WE ARE HAVING SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT BEING ABLE TO MOVE MATTERS FORWARD ALONG THE LINES PREVIOUSLY DISCUSSED WITH SAUDIS, AND SUSPICIONS THAT WE ARE SEEKING TO SUBSTITUTE FURTHER EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI NEGOTIATIONS FOR U.S. ACTION. HE WAS AT THE SAME TIME PLEASED THAT SECRETARY HAD CONSIDERED IT IMPORTANT TO GIVE SAUDIS SO FULL AND EARLY A REPORT ON THE LEEDS TALKS. IF NOTHING MORE, I BELIEVE THIS MEETING HAS CONTRIBUTED TO OUR EFFORT TO PERSUADE SAUDIS TO GIVE SOME MORE TIME TO SADAT - PROBABLY NOT BECAUSE I CONVINCED HIM HE WAS WRONG IN HIS FLAT ASSERTION THAT "SADAT INITIATIVE IS DEAD," BUT RATHER BECAUSE WE HAVE ASKED FOR MORE TIME.

10. DEPARTMENT PLEASE REPEAT TO CAIRO, JIDDA AND TEL AVIV. SUDDARTH UNQTE VANCE

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